

## MY REFUGEES.

DR. JOYCE came in while I was giving the Captain his dinner. It was not his hour for visiting my ward, so I put down my gruel-spoon and looked up to see what was the matter.

"Can't you come out and see to this arrival?" he asked, stopping a few feet in front of me, with his finger on Tom's pulse, his hand filled with lemonade for Dick, and his eyes on Harry, so economical of his time was our little Doctor. In fact, I do not think that since I came to the hospital I had succeeded in gaining his undivided attention for a single full minute in working hours. I regarded this as an insult at first; but discovering at length how much he depended on these fragmentary notes which he took of his patients, I had learned to hide my diminished head, and consider myself once for all a lesser light in his presence. But there is a natural perversity about me, which in spite of such discipline "still lived." It was with an instinct for which I do not hold myself at all accountable that I turned away from him with as professional an air as I could assume, and began choking the gruel down the poor Captain's throat, as if the safety of the army depended on its descent therein, while I asked, in my most business-like tones,

"What is it?"

"Three—a man already gone with typhoid, wife, and a child—refugees."

"Hum! well?"

"I want you to get hold of the woman and feed her up: she's a mere shadow."

"And the man?"

Dr. Joyce looked round the ward; so did I. I had one empty bed. A little pale-faced boy had left it only yesterday, and gone—well to a

better rest, I trust; for I found a tiny Testament in his hand when I folded it with the other. It was open, and his finger was on a prayer—one of the old, old prayers which are always new, that his mother had marked for him. I had a fancy for the poor, home-sick fellow, and had looked at his empty bed with something of that feeling with which one goes into the twilight of a room a friend has left dark forever. I shrank from the thought of seeing a stranger there so soon; a very foolish fancy for a hospital nurse, of course, but some of these boys had become friends indeed in the long months I had cared for them. Besides this, I had as much work on hand as it seemed to me I could well attend to without a little larger allowance of strength than usually falls to the lot of womankind, nurses not excepted. There was Mrs. Cruppins had four or five empty beds, though she was the last person I should want to go to, to be nursed through a fever; and there was Miss Graves, she could take three more as well as not, even if she did go about her work like a martyr, and turn her ward into a church-vault, with her funeral face and her melancholy and interesting way of sighing over the men. What if the Doctor did prefer, and very naturally, to call on me? there was a limit to all things. So when I looked at him I was going to own up to my hidden depravity, and say that No. 2 didn't want the new-comer.

The Doctor is a discreet man, and can read the signs of the weather. He gave me a generous half of one of his professional glances, and remarked quietly to a curious young sergeant in the corner who had employed the time of my meditation in asking a volley of questions,

"Yes, half-starved, but thinks only of her husband and child; the infant is more dead than alive."

Something rose in my throat and choked me.

"What a heathen!"

"Who? I or the typhoid?"

"Neither of you," I responded, curtly; "bring him in here."

The Doctor went away with the least bit of a smile twitching the corners of his mouth. I felt too humble just then to take any notice of it, so I meekly returned to the Captain and his gruel, gave him his powders, tucked him up for a nap, and when Dr. Joyce came back I was ready for him.

A number of these refugees had dropped into our hospital since I had been there, for two-thirds of the poor creatures are fit for nothing but a sick-bed by the time they reach Nashville, and I supposed I knew what to expect. But the sight I saw struck me dumb. Two shrunken, ghost-like figures, their clothes in tatters, covered with mire and blood, their faces so gaunt that, looking at them, a chill crept over me, as if I looked on Death.

But this was not a time to grow nervous. I roused myself with a start, and touched the man's hand to see if it were flesh and blood. In reply to my words of welcome he thanked me

in a feeble sort of way, putting his hand uncertainly to his forehead, like one of failing memory, and leaning heavily against the door. He evidently needed prompt attention, for the fever was far advanced. While the Doctor led him to the bed I had time to notice his short, thick-set figure, the shaggy hair falling about his low forehead, and the eyes that still showed honest and kindly, though they were deep-sunken and burned with fever; the scar of an old gun-wound in his neck, and his hands coarse and brown with labor. Before this war had made him what he was, he had evidently been of the poor of the earth. God's poor, were they? May we have mercy on all such!

He was far too weak to answer questions. I left him sitting wearily on the side of the bed for the Doctor to undress, and turned back to the woman. She was standing where I had left her, with her baby in her arms, her eyes following every motion of her husband's.

"Come," I said, "into my room, and I'll see what I can do for you."

"And him?" pointing toward the bed.

"You shall come back and see him."

She followed me slowly, hushing the wail of her half-starved child, but saying nothing to me. Indeed, she seemed to have hardly life enough left to speak. In an incredibly short time she and the child were washed and dressed in sundry garments of my own, which, though they could not be said to fit in the most perfect manner conceivable, especially on the baby, had at least the advantage of being clean. After they were fed and rested, I had for the first time a critical look at the woman. Slight, and worn, as the Doctor said, to a shadow; stooping shoulders, consumptive chest, and large, work-worn hands; a very pale face, one of the palest I ever saw except in death, with thin, dark hair lying against her temples, where I could see the great purple veins, and eyes which had once been bright black, but now were dulled and sunken. Out of them, when they were raised to mine, came a look so dumb with suffering, so dark with utter hopelessness, that I could not bear to meet it. It never changed. She smiled at me when I brought her baby fresh milk from the kitchen, or tended the little thing while she ate herself; she thanked me; her thin, quavering voice grown quite sweet with gratitude, but the dreariness of that steady look never varied by so much as a momentary gleam of light or softness. It reminded me of a picture I have somewhere seen, to which the artist had given the rather indefinite title of "Desolate;" but which, nevertheless, was a spirited thing, and had staid by me—the figure of a woman in relief against a stormy sky; around her a desert beach strewn with wrecks; her hair blown darkly about her face, and her eyes turned to the waste of waters: a lonely sea-bird startled from the cliffs, dipping into the foam of a chilly, green wave at her feet, and behind the purple line of water that bounded her vision the setting of a blood-red sun.

Perhaps you smile at my fancy. I think the woman herself might have done so had she known it. Certainly she would not have comprehended it. She sat, quietly rocking her baby, her hands folded over its little fingers, her eyes on its face.

"You have had a hard journey?" I questioned, gently.

"Yes."

"Was it very long?"

"Yes."

She looked at me then a moment without speaking. I understood her.

"You do not wish to talk about it now," I said. "I will not trouble you with any questions."

"Thank you."

She recommenced her low lullaby, and while I stood watching her somebody knocked at the door. It was Tim, the errand-boy. He delivered his message after his usual fashion, balancing himself first on one foot, then on the other, regarding me meanwhile with half-closed eyes, and giving his bushy head a series of little nods with an air of authority peculiarly pleasing.

"Davy Brown's heart's broke for his dinner, an' the sargint says his bandages's come off, an' he wants you double-quick; an' Pat Mullins he's ben howlin' over his arm this hour."

Being serenely conscious that I had been absent but twenty minutes I answered his innuendo only by a withering look, closed the door softly, for my ideas of babies being rather vague I was not prepared to state whether the creaking of a latch would start one of those infantile choruses I live in such constant terror of or not, so I thought it best to be on the safe side. The hopeful Tim whistled on before me down the stairs, and I went back to my work, with my heart for the first time deserting my boys, and wandering to my room and its pale-faced occupant.

It was a busy afternoon. Brown must have his dinner, the howling of Pat the indefatigable must be stopped, and I must go back to the sergeant's arm. A solitary rebel in the corner took an hour of my time for his bandages and ablutions, spinning it out with remonstrances and complaints so many, and various, and profane, that I felt a strong desire to pull the sheet up over his head, tie it down at the four corners of the bed, and leave him there to struggle and stifle and swear at his own sweet will. There was a favorite drummer-boy, too, whose eyes asked mutely for help—a little patient fellow whom I had taken into my heart from the first day he came to me. I always had to time myself when I was caring for him, for fear I should be accused of partiality. Then some one had been awake all the night before, and must be read into a nap; and then there were letters to be written, and medicines to mix and choke down innumerable throats, and windows to open and windows to shut, and business with the matron, and messages to the doctor, and then at last suppers to get, and supper to eat.

My refugee had found her way down again to her husband. He was tossing now on his bed, delirious with the fever. There was little to do for him, however, and I saw she was neither a fussy nor an ignorant nurse, but sat quite still with one arm around her baby who slept, and the other attending to the sick man's every want; so I let her be. There was a bit of a room next mine, which had belonged to a nurse who was off duty, and home last week with slow fever. I obtained the promise of this for her, and when, at half past ten o'clock, I dragged myself up stairs, jaded and cross enough, I found her there. I saw her through the open door with the light of my dim lamp falling full on her bent figure and white face. She looked up at me, silently, her great dark eyes followed all my motions about the room. It gave me a nameless, uncomfortable feeling that made me turn and look over my shoulder, when I went into the closet, or a dark corner. I began to have serious fears as to the practicability of sleep that night, with nothing but an unbarred door between me and this ghost of a woman. In fact, I may as well acknowledge that I am naturally of a romantic turn of mind, and had anticipated the recital of her adventures in various forms; as, for example, whether she might be a spy, or a Southern aristocrat in disguise, and I believe I even speculated upon the possibility of a chalked negro.

But when I turned again, and saw how wearily she leaned her head upon her hand, how crushed and hopeless was the pressure of her lips, I forgot every thing but my pity. I went up and touched the hand which lay upon the baby's hair, and said: "I am so sorry for you!"

She quivered under my touch, and looked up at me, her lips working beseechingly. Then I don't know how it was, but she began to talk, and I listened; I forgot that I was tired and sleepy; my romantic fancies dissolved like the dew. I forgot that she was ignorant and poor. I only knew that she suffered, and sat quite still to hear her story.

The woman's name was Mary—Mary Rand. I liked the name for her. Do you remember some one's saying—Tennyson, I think—of Mary the mourner at Bethany, that her "eyes were homes of silent prayer?" I thought of this often. Such a cry went up to God out of her mute look. I thought it must ring through heaven. I never heard from the lips of any preacher such a prayer.

She had lived in the southern part of the State. Her husband had done a small fishing business on one of the inferior rivers, getting but a scanty living for a wife and five little ones, though a more honest one than many of his kind to whom the South closes the avenues of useful labor. I could see the home in a picture while she talked. A house with broken roof and low doorway, half hidden under the great forest trees, which stretched out such giant branches over it, and cradled it so quietly all summer long; the little river that wound among the trees, over which the sunlight slanted and the

wind swept like a merry song; the tidy rooms within the house, this stricken mother then so cheery about her work, turning such smiling eyes toward the river which bore her husband's boat, or such reverent eyes up to the sky which showed so blue and still through the vines about the doorway, taking into her heart such happy thoughts of God in the silence of this home He had given her; the children romping in the forest, or grouped about the door with the light on their chubby brown faces and tangled curls, or watching the river turn into molten gold when the sun set, and they waited for the father to come home from work, wading into the water to crowd in his boat for a sail of a few strokes length; then clinging to him up the path, and into the house, where supper stood waiting, and the mother too. An humble meal, and very poor the lowly home, but none the less dear for that. There was sunlight and love enough in it, as there must have always been under the sound of this woman's voice.

The man had been loyal from the first of the war. This, I suspected, was owing to the wife. She had picked up a little learning somewhere—enough to spell out her Bible; it was partly this, but more a certain crude refinement that asserted her superiority. Something there was in this woman's soul which spoke like a voice out of the darkness of all the circumstance which hemmed her in, and let you see how pure a soul it was, and what it might have been if God had given it light to grow in.

So, of course, she knew her country at once.

"I wasn't goin' to hev Stephen settin up agin the kentry," she said; "and by'n-by he see it as I did, fur he's an honest man in his pinions is Stephen, an' he used ter set the children a hoorayin' fur the flag ter see which on 'em could holler the loudest."

Of course a harmless, ignorant fisherman, loving his country in the solitude of a forest, could not be left long undiscovered and unpunished in this chivalric Southern land.

"They found him out at last," she said. "A whole pack on 'em went at him every time he went to town with fish, and they didn't give him no peace; but he never caved in to 'em—not a mite, an' the more they worried him the more he sot up fur the Guv'nment; an' at last it come—what we'd ben livin' in fear on a long spell. It was one dark night—I remember how the wind was howlin' like among the trees—an' we heerd on a sudden a yellin' like a pack o' hounds outside the door, an' it bust open, an' some officers was there, an' a gang o' drunken men behind 'em. I knew to once what it meant."

"Stephen," says I, "they've drafted yer." He looked so like a tiger they durstn't touch him. His gun was in the corner, and I see him lookin' at it, so I knew as well as ef he'd telled me what ter do; but the officers, they'd spied it out, an' one on 'em he held me so I couldn't move, an' t'others panted their pistols on Stephen an' tuk him off; he couldn't help it no way. It made me wild-like. I got away from the man as held

me with a great leap, an' got the gun. They was jest out o' the door then, but I could ha' hit 'em. Stephen turned round an' see me, and says he:

"Don't, fur God's sake, Mary—they'll murder both on us!" An' then I couldn't see his face fur the dark, an' I knew he was gone. I fell down by the gun all in a heap on the floor; the childern was cryin' an' kissin' of me, an' tuggin' at my dress, but I never took no notice on 'em. I heerd the men howlin' outside, but I never moved. All to once there was a great red light out the winder, an' I heerd wood cracklin' an' smelt smoke in the bedroom, an' I knew they'd fired the house. I ketched up the childern—two in my arms, an' one on my shoulders, an' two pullin' at my skirt—an' run out o' the door. It seemed as ef a pack o' wild beasts was out thar in the burnin' light. They chased me a ways, till I got to whar the woods was thick an' dark as pitch; an' at last I found they was gone, an' I dropped down in a thicket like as ef I was dead, hidin' the childern under my dress. They might ha' murdered us all. There was wus things than that done up the river last week. By'n-by, as nobody come, I durst look round. I heerd the shoutin' a good ways off, an' I see a great light on the sky, an' knew the house was blazin' up. After a time it went out, an' the hollerin' was fainter, goin' back ter town. Then 'twas still, only the branches creaked, an' I heerd the wind blowin' over the river. The woods was dead black, an' I looked up to the sky, an' there wasn't a star to be seen, an' the great dew dropped down like rain. I huddled the childern up to me to keep 'em warm ef I could, an' the little things cried 'emsels ter sleep. They was very heavy, an' cramped my arms till they was stiff, but I didn't mind; an' it grew very cold, but I never thought on't. I only looked up whar the sky was dark, an' all night long I was prayin' fur my husband.

"When mornin' come we hid in the darkest place we could find, an' staid thar till the sun was jest over our heads. But nobody come after us; so I crawled round an' found some berries an' a brook fur the childern ter drink out of, an' I had two little ginger-cakes in my pocket, an' we lived on them all day.

"The next day it were jest the same. I never darin' ter go back, an' the childern cryin' fur someat ter eat. When night come I were too faint to move, fur all I found I giv' to them. I had dropped down on the moss, an' was givin' up ter die thar, when all to once I heerd a noise in the bushes, and I says, 'O God! tuk care on the childern.' 'Yes,' says somebody close by; 'He's sent me ter tuk care on 'em;' and I jumped up with a great scream, fur there was Stephen alive, an' huggin' and kissin' of me an' the childern, an' givin' us a loaf o' bread he'd found nigh the old place as he crep' along in the thicket ter get a look at the heap o' ashes that was left. An' he telled us how he'd runned from the fellar as ketched him, an' we'd hide in the woods, an' all go North together, whar none on 'em couldn't touch us.

"An' I jes' put both my arms round his neck, an' I says, 'Stephen, God's giv' me you back, an' I doan't ask no more. I guess He'll tuk care on us, an' we'll go.' I used ter read how He loved folks as was in trouble; I used ter believe it—maybe I was wrong, maybe not. I doan't know."

She stopped a moment, some strange, dark glitter creepin' into her eyes. After that they changed only to grow more stony; and her voice, as she went on with her story, was cold and hard.

"So we tuk up with the woods for a home, an' 'twere all the home we hed fur three months. We dursn't go anigh the railroads, an' we traveled mostly whar the forest was loneliest, an' the swamps a-plenty. Thar was cold nights too, when the wind cut into us, an' the damp seemed ter choke us like; an' thar was rainy nights, when we crep' under the bushes, and Stephen he allers tuk off his coat ter cover the rest on us, an' thar were no stoppin' of him no way. An' I'd wake up a-cryin' in my dream, an' see his face while he slep' lookin' so white with the cold, an' the childern shiverin' all night; an' I'd lay an' cry an' cry, and the rain cried along with me on the leaves, but it never stopped fur all that. Sometimes we found a shed or a barn whar folks let us sleep, an' sometimes when thar warn't no rebel sojers anigh the place they'd let us in the house.

"But the starvin' come the wust. Folks give us meals sometime, ef we durst go out into the road ter hunt up a house. Then, agin, they cussed us, an' shet the door 'cause we was 'darned Yankees,' yer know. Thar was a few as give us a basketful o' victuals, and it lasted fur a long spell. When we couldn't get nothin', Stephen, he shot rabbits an' birds, an' we picked berries, an' ketched fish; fur he wouldn't never steal, that man wouldn't, ef he was ter die fur it. But there was days when we hadn't nothin', an' the childern cried an' teased fur food, an' I only jes' sot an' looked at 'em, an' hadn't nothin' ter give 'em, only ter hold 'em in my arms, an' tell 'em ter fold their little hands an' say, 'Our Father.' The poor innocents stopped cryin' allers, 'cause they thought He'd throw 'em down bread from heaven. In course He did give us someat mostly, or we'd all a ben under the grass; but He didn't send enough ter keep the childern. Four on 'em is dead. He didn't leave one big enough ter call me mother, or kiss me with its little comfortin' ways; there's nobody left but the baby. I doan't know why she stood it, when the rest couldn't. P'raps because I kep' it under my shawl mostly, an' it were the warmest of all on us.

"Jack went fust—that was his father's boy. He tuk fever in them marshes, an' kinder wasted afore we knew it. I went out ter hunt up some supper one night, an' left the boy with Stephen. After I'd ben a little ways I come back ter say good-by—I didn't know what fur, only I couldn't help it. He was lyin' in his father's arms, an' he says: 'When you come back with some sup-

per sing me ter sleep, mother.' So I says, 'Yes, Jackey,' an' I leaned over ter kiss him. 'Good-by, mother,' says he, an' he put up his little white lips. An' all the way I heerd it—'Good-by, mother.' It were like as ef the trees kep' tellin' it, an' the birds singin' it in their nests, an' the great blow o' wind that had come up, cryin' it over an' over. I put my hands up to my ears not ter hear it, an' I runned out o' the woods ter get away from it; for we must hev some supper, an' it were safer fur me ter go than Stephen—folks didn't notice a woman so much. I found a bit of a house anigh the woods as give me some bread an' a pail o' milk—they was Union folks; an' I was happy-like, fur Jackey would like the milk, yer know. All the way back I was thinkin' as how his eyes would laugh at the sight on't—pretty eyes they was, Miss, like his father's, blue an' bright like. Thar was a great white moon come up afore I got thar; an' I see how the light was down in the holler whar I'd left him like a sheet dropped on the bushes. Pretty soon I see 'em all—the childern standin' round all in a heap, an' Stephen settin' on the ground with his face in his hat. My heart kinder stood still all to once, but I walked along. Stephen he see me, an' got up, an' come up ter me. He didn't say nothin'; but only jes' tuk my hands an' led me to whar somethin' lay black an' still under a tree. An' I looked down an' I called out 'Jackey! Jackey!' but he didn't make no answer, an' I touched his little face, an' all to once I knew he was dead. I threw down the milk an' bread I'd brought so fur for him, an' I tuk his poor head in my lap, an' held tight hold uv his little cold hands. I hadn't ben thar, yer see, an' it come hard ter hev him die without his mother. I promised ter sing him ter sleep, an' now I were too late—he couldn't hear me. The moon was very white, and I heerd the childern sobbin' an' Stephen were callin' uv me an' kissin' uv me, but I couldn't answer him nohow, an' I couldn't cry. I doan't know much how the night went. I sat an' watched the little shadders from the leaves comin' an' goin' on the boy's forehead, an' thought how they kissed it like, an' how he wouldn't never feel me kissin' him agin. He were sech a pretty boy, yer know, an' I never were thar to see him die, an' I never sung that little song.

"Twarn't only a week along from this when Stephen he got took. He went fur victuals an' didn't come home. We waited fur him all day an' he didn't come, an' we slep' all night alone under the trees waitin' fur him. But when mornin' come an' no Stephen, I knew ter once what it meant, and I war right. Somebody as knew him tracked him an' ketched him in a yard whar he was beggin' our breakfast. The folks was rebels an' guv him up easy. They tuk him along—two officers thar, was—an' got a good piece with him; but they hadn't no han'cuffs an' was weakly plantation gentlemen. So he broke away. He knocked one on 'em down an' tuk his gun an' runned. T'other fellar he fired

an' hit Stephen in the neck; but Stephen is a firs'-rate shot an' the fellar dropped down. I doan't know whether he war hurt bad, but he never chased him any. Stephen crawled back pretty nigh us, an' 'twas the second day I heerd him groanin' in the bushes. He was lyin' thar all covered with blood when I come up. We got him down in a big swamp, an' thar we hid fur a long spell. We hed mostly warm nights while he were sick, an' no rain ter speak on; but the damp was like pison fur us all to be a breathin' on. I nussed him all I could, 'twarn't much in sech a place, an' I used ter crawl out every night ter find food fur to-morrer.

"Twarn't fur as we'd gone after he'd got so's to be movin' afore the twins took sick. They didn't stan' it long, an' it were better fur 'em, poor things! When I see 'em both pinin' ter once, their little hands so poor an' white, an' heerd 'em moanin' in my arms, I were slow believin' of it. I thought it were enough to be lonely fur Jackey all the nights an' days—to be missin' of him every year, an' be cryin' fur the pretty boy he'd ha' growed ter be. I never thought I'd lose no more—I never thought on't. It come ter me one night when the childern hed ben sinkin' nigh most the afternoon. We hed stopped with 'em by a little brook whar the bushes was thick an' warm. On a sudden Stephen he called out, 'Mary,' says he, 'they're goin' ter see Jackey.' I looked up into his eyes an' I says, 'Stephen, it'll kill me.' He put his hands up ter his face an' I heerd him choke like. 'Mary,' says he, 'I can't comfort yer.' I never see him so afore. Thar hadn't never ben a time when he didn't cheer me up an' kiss me ef any thin' vexed me—I hadn't never borne the least uv a trouble alon' sence we was married. So I knew how it cut inter his heart to hev the childern took, an' how selfish it war in me ter forget he loved 'em jes' the same as I did. I shet my lips then an' never said another word.

"So we sat down ter see 'em die. The sun was settin' like a great red ball over the thicker. I remember how I looked round an' see a sparrow as crep' into her nest under the grass. The little ones was chirpin' at her, an' she was answerin' of 'em. I couldn't bear ter hear 'em no way. I thought how God was makin' a little wuthless bird happy, an' hed forgot me, an' 'was takin' all my little ones away. I wouldn't never hev 'em in my nest ter sing tu like she. I see every thing about me that night. I remember a great white rock an' sand-bank over in the field standin' out agin' the sun, an' how I thought the brook looked like blood, fur the light were so red on't. I see 'em all—I see 'em over an' over, an' yet I doan't think I tuk my eyes off the childern.

"Stephen tuk Katie, an' I held the boy, an' we sot tergether by the brook an' see the night comin'. We never said nothin' to each other, it wouldn't do no good. Ef I'd spoke once I should ha' cried out, so I should ha' worried the little dying things. I heerd Stephen prayin' to himself over Katie—a sort uv whisperin'

prayer, as ef he didn't hardly know he was sayin' uv it; but I didn't say none. I never spoke ter God all night—I ders'ent; I might ha' cursed Him.

"Dick went fust. Katie she held out till nigh mornin', but I jes' sot with the boy stone-cold on my knee, an' never telled Stephen. I see him bendin' over the little thing in his arms, his face lookin' so white, even in the dark, an' I heerd him prayin', 'O God! leave one on 'em—leave one 'em—doan't take 'em both!' I couldn't ha' telled him no way. Katie wore past speakin' then; but I could jes' see her little face from whar I sat. Dick's hands was close in mine—I hadn't never let go sence they growed cold. I ses after a while a bit of light shinin' in the brook, an' I knew the stars was out. But I never looked up at the sky. He was thar as had taken away my childern. He was so fur up. I thought He never cared. Ef He'd forgot me 'twarn't no use fur me ter be lookin' at His sky an' sayin' over His prayers. So I sat an' see the shinin' in the brook an' the two little white faces. I heerd Mattie hushin' the baby ter sleep whar I'd left her under the bushes. The little thing crep' up once an' put her warm fingers on my face an' kissed me.

"I heerd Katie moanin', an' I see Stephen holdin' uv her all night. When the fast mornin' light come in through the trees we turned an' looked at one another, an' they was both dead. We made 'em two little graves by the brook an' buried 'em thar. Then we tuk hold uv hands an' kneeled down on the moss, an' Stephen he prayed sech a prayer as I never heerd afore. It made me look up ter the sky fur the fast time an' see how blue it was, an' how bright the trees was in the sun, an' think how they'd be blue an' bright over the little cold things, jes' the same when we was gone, an' how we'd leave 'em all alone so fur behind us. Then I cried—oh, how I did cry! I hadn't cried afore fur weeks—I got so frozen like—an' I hain't dropped a tear sence.

"So we got up an' stepped over the brook, lookin' back ter say 'good-by' to the little graves, an' went on with Mattie an' the baby. We come ter safer travelin' soon, an' found a house by the road as tuk us in an' hid us up garret fur a spell. They was good to us, God bless 'em! an' giv us enough to eat; but all the nussin' an' warm fires was too late fur Mattie. They made a bed fur her up in the loft, an' when the poor little white thing put her arms around me and cried ter go to sleep, 'cause she was so cold an' tired, I knew to once what it meant. 'Twarn't only one sort o' sleep as would do her good, so I telled she might, tryin' ter smile an' say as how God would giv her a nice nap. I see her shet her eyes, an' I crossed her little hands, an' I telled God thar warn't nothin' left but Stephen an' the baby, an' ef He was goin' ter tuk 'em He'd better do it now while they had a roof to die under. But Stephen p'inted ter the little dead thing on the bed, an' asked me ef I'd get to whar she was, sayin' sech things ter Him as

had tuk her away from sorrer an' sufferin', an' made her a little angel to hum with Him forever. So he put the baby in my arms an' made me say a prayer over after him—he were allers the best on us both, Stephen were. It was I as learned him ter read the Bible, but I didn't never remember it like he. He tuk it all to once inter his heart, an' did what it telled him fur himself an' me too. I keep a doubtin' an' a doubtin', but Stephen he takes it all, Miss, jes' like a little child. Well, then we cut off some uv Mattie's yeller curls, an' he laid 'em in my Bible, so when I wanted ter kiss 'em I had ter kiss it too, yer see, and read the promise which telled me as how I'd never be forsook.

"After that we found we was suspected of bein' thar, an' the folks couldn't keep us no longer; so we was off agin—us threc alone. Then we come across some Union sojers as tuk us up here in the cars, an' a chaplain as paid our fare, an' so we come here this mornin', Miss. Stephen he's clean beat out; but ef God hain't forgot all about us, an' he gets well an' strong, we'll go ter work an' get an honest home. I doan't know as I can ever call it home, an' all them little things as was playin' round the old place by the river lyin' cold an' stiff in the swamps."

Just then her baby wakened and began to laugh and coo at her in its pretty way, putting up its tiny hands to play about her face. There was something so warm and tender and full of life in the touch; I saw the chill melt out of her eyes; I saw her lips quiver. I am not ashamed to tell you what I did. I just went up to her, put both my arms around her neck, and her head on my shoulder, and began to cry. After a while I found that she was crying too. I knew that was a mercy to her; so I laid her down on the bed, and knelt down and said over some little short prayer, to which she seemed to listen. Then I put her baby in her arms, thinking it could comfort her best, shut the door softly, and went out.

Stephen Rand grew very sick. Dr. Joyce began to come away from his bedside looking quite grave. Whatever the wife saw in his face she did not comprehend, or else for some reason her own did not reflect it. Every day, early and late, morning and night, she was beside him, silent as a shadow, her patient face never turned from his.

The men began to watch for her as she came in each morning. Sometimes they would pass her baby round from cot to cot for a plaything, or they would send some cheery message to her in their hearty, soldier fashion, seeming pleased at her grateful smile. But as the days went on, and they saw how the fever was burning in her husband's eye and cheek, and caught snatches of the consultations the Doctor and I had over him out in the entry, I noticed how often they hushed their noisy jokes and laughter when they looked over to the man's corner, and how many anxious inquiries for our refugees met me every morning.



It puzzled me at first to see how entirely Nature seemed to have confused her rules in the hearts of these two. The man clinging to her, resting so in her strength and love, yet fancying still in his delirium that he was again her protector in the dangers of their forest life; taking with such a childlike trust the truths from the Bible she had taught him to understand, giving them back to her with a faith as pure as a woman's; yet withal a brave man, no coward in principle, no craven in danger.

And for the wife, her face, as I had first seen it, told what she was. What we mean by the innate religion of a woman was with her dimmed or missing. There are natures which *must* feel every wave, and tide, and current that pulses about them—which must try the *lowest* deep before they can anchor. Once bedded, the waters from very depth are still: the sea, however stormy, can not shake that which is sure and steadfast. Far beyond them, in shallow waves, some little craft will have anchored in the sunlight, and we who watch that other tossing in the surge, and hear the cry which calls from deep unto deep, perhaps turn away unpitying. For, we say, there seems a fairer haven, and they would not enter it.

With just enough intellect to stagger her faith, not enough to root it, the intensity of the life this woman had led had not yet worked out its own fulfillment. Looking a few steps onward to what was before her I trembled for her. What chance was God giving her? Would He not bring the soothing of a little rest into her weary days?

I used to wonder as I looked up often at her from my work, and saw how quietly she sat, "the same loved, tireless watcher," how her husband's eyes followed hers, and his voice called her, how they clung to one another—these two from whom God had taken all else but the knowledge of what they were each to each—I used to wonder how she could bear it to have him go.

Out of those busy days I have saved many pleasant pictures of her as she sat fanning the hot air about the bed, watching for all little cares for her husband, hushing her baby, or perhaps bowing her head, her lips moving as if in prayer. And I thought what it would be when for such tender offices no voice would call to her.

Once, I remember, I was busy over the Captain not far from her, and I saw her turn suddenly in answer to her husband's call.

"Mary, whar's the baby?"

"Here, Stephen."

She held up the little thing so that he could see it, her eyes on him, and not on the child. He put up his thin hand and touched its face.

"It's all we've got left, Mary, ain't it?"

"Hush, Stephen man! Yer too sick ter think on't now."

"No. I allers think when I'm awake the rest is better off. I like ter think who's tuk 'em."

"I doan't;" in a quick, sharp tone.

"Mary! Mary! yer must. Yer might tempt Him ter do wus things."

She made no answer, but I could see her thin lips compress suddenly, and I marked how the purple veins were swelling on her forehead.

Her husband passed his hand over the baby's puny face, and then looked up at her.

"Mary, ef I should be took—"

She stopped him with a low, sharp cry, and caught both his hands in hers.

"Stephen, yer won't," she said.

A bit of sunlight had fallen across the bed and touched the three, dropping off from her dark hair and her deep-set, glowing eyes, down on the sunken face upon the pillow, and then on the little child, who saw it with a bubbling laugh, and put up its hands to catch the golden motes that floated past.

She caught at it quickly, as if it were a promise.

"Yer've ben dreamin', Stephen," she said, with a nervous laugh. "The sun's come ter wake yer. Why, man, yer most well. I haven't seen yer luk so natural-like sence you was sick."

She bent over with a long look into her husband's eyes, and pressed her lips to his. She did not notice that a cloud had dimmed the warm light which was there but a moment before, and that the face which it had for the instant touched with a glow of health was pallid again in the gray of the dull afternoon.

That was some strange contradiction in her nature—this woman with the desolate eyes and frozen voice—which, while it accepted all life as without hope, for the graves which had closed above it, yet was so blind to the fact that she stood on the brink of another. Clinging so tenaciously to the one love yet left to her—feeling so sure that God *could* not take away her husband—who could wake her from her dream? Not I, surely. I watched her as the slow days passed—the morning sun, the twilight, the night that fell with such heavy shadows on the hospital floor—finding her alike with that steady look in her eyes and that firm hand which betokened as yet no shade of fear or doubt.

Sometimes I thought a glimpse of what was coming darkened before her for a moment. There was one day when her husband had been in wild delirium all night, and the morning had found him in a state of half stupor. She had stood long beside him, watching his almost lifeless face in silence. I came up, at last, and begged her to go down into the yard with me for a few moments for a breath of fresh air.

She turned with the quick movement of one in wonder at my question.

"I can't."

"But you will be sick yourself if you breathe nothing but this hospital air. The Doctor will look after your husband; and Tim, you know, calls me if I am needed."

"I can't."

"But if he is worse, and you can not then do any thing for him—"

She caught up her baby, stooped and kissed her husband's forehead, then followed me without a word. I led her out into the sunlight, and having some little nicety to cook for one of my boys I left her, and went into the kitchen. I could see her through the windows, pacing back and forth under the two or three stunted trees that grew by the fence, her eyes on the ground, the bit of blue sky above her head, and the fresh morning all about her. All about her—not shrinking from her dark, uncheerful figure and bloodless face, but touching them softly like a blessing. Back and forth—to and fro—I thought how soon she would walk back and forth, and to and fro alone in a desert world.

In a few moments I went out to get the other half of my breath of air. It was a little yard, but filled just then with drying clothes, drying pans, Irish maids, and maids of color.

A pretty mulatto girl stood coquetting with her lover over the fence. A swarm of little children were playing in the street—black and white alike; indeed, one was hardly distinguishable from the other, for they were all massed in the ditch, deep in the mysteries of "mud-pies." I noticed, in fact, that Young Africa had decidedly the advantage as regarded skill in their culinary operations; and as for strength of lung and fist, my little white brethren came off second best. For which I pitied the young gentlemen, and began mentally to reconsider the question whether I was an abolitionist. They did not form an unpleasant picture, however, with the light on their merry faces and gay dress; and the sound of their happy laughter rang like a bell on the morning air. Close beside me, too, on the steps, a little coal-black baby, belonging to one of our wash-women, lay cooing in the sun, making sundry demonstrations with its hands and feet, as if it fought with a whole race of imaginary slaveholders. I saw Mary Rand stoop to kiss it as she walked, looking at its chubby face and then at the puny little one she held nestled under her shawl. She stopped, too, with a long look at the group of children in the street, her eyes shaded with her hand so I could not see them. Then turning, as she resumed her walk, to watch the happy lovers at the fence. Yet she looked upon them all with the apathy with which we recall some bright dream. It was but a dream; we wake and it is gone. Seeking for it, we find only the silence of the night. So we sleep no longer, but wait for the daybreak. Well for us if it comes. But if He who said "Let there be light!" revokes His decree and the darkness lingers—then, also, it is well.

Presently the noon hour struck, and the father of the pugilistic baby on the steps came home from work, stopping a moment to come in and take up the little thing. The mother came out to meet him.

"Hi, Dan! it am an awfu' heat for ye to work, dis yere!"

"Hot enuff," replied Dan; "ye look beat out, little woman."

He stooped, with one arm still around the baby, and put the other about her neck to kiss her. The woman returned the kiss boisterously, but none the less lovingly for that, and looked up into his face with a hearty, happy laugh. Then they walked away, and down the street together. It was a little thing; but do you not know that the smallest knives are keenest? I turned toward the quiet figure which had been pacing back and forth. It was quiet no longer. She looked up at me quickly, her whole face quivering. Then she wrung her hands tightly across her forehead, hurried past me, and into the house.

We had some busy days after this. There were two deaths and a fresh relay of wounded, among whom were a number of rebel prisoners—whom I sent, by-the-way, to Mrs. Cruppins. I acquit myself of all unholy self-indulgence in this arrangement. I felt that I was serving my country in sending her enemies to the most uncomfortable place I had at command.

After the first gloom caused by the two empty beds and the sight of fresh suffering had passed away, the boys rallied from it into such a programme of jokes and laughter as quite filled the day. I began to think they had forgotten their sympathy with our refugees, and was musing upon the fickleness of human nature while I sat one morning in a meditative attitude before the kitchen fire, my sleeves rolled up, my eyes fixed reflectively upon a basin of arrow-root, and blessed with the consciousness that my face was slowly but surely turning to "celestial rosy red" over the coals. While thus occupied I neglected the warning of a familiar whistle, and was paid for it by hearing a suppressed snicker behind the door, and feeling the gaze of two very small gray eyes fastened upon me through the crack.

"Cool weather, ain't it?"

The remark was supposed to be addressed to some invisible infant whom I could hear crawling opportunely about in the same mysterious corner. The infant assented by a scream which set every one of my nerves on edge.

"Maybe we'd like our pacter took," rejoined the Invisible.

Again the infant assented as before. The assent was followed by the same results. I buckled on my armor at this. I took off my arrow-root with a jerk, called indiscriminately on the various maids of the tub and ironing-board about me to go to the rescue of the musical child, repressed a strong desire to throw my steaming gruel at the eyes behind the crack, and marched up to the offender.

"Tim," I said, sternly, "is this you?"

"That's allers ben my 'pinion, Miss."

"What do you wish?"

"Dr. Jyce sent fur you, post haste."

My desire concerning the arrow-root this time got so far under way of fulfillment that I saved it and my dignity only by a sudden pull, and the lucky Tim escaped with a few drops on his hand. Enough, however, was perhaps as good



as a feast, for he grew suddenly dumb, and followed me meekly up the stairs, eyeing the while his reddened finger with a thoughtful aspect which gave me the greatest satisfaction.

The Doctor met me with a grave face.

"Well?" I said, stopping short.

"Stephen Rand—he can't last through the night, unless there is some change I see no reason to expect."

"Who'll tell her?"

"You must."

"Dr. Joyce," said I, "I'm no coward, and I never disobey orders; but I wish you'd find me a few moments to go away and cry first."

"Why—why, really," said this good man, whom I puzzled every day by my feminine developments, "I don't see how you can be spared just now. There's the man who came last night waiting for a fresh bandage; and Jones, and—I don't see how there's time just at present."

Of course there wasn't. I knew that very well. I must face duty if it put me in the front and held me under the guns.

I found the boys quite sober as I passed along finishing all most pressing work, and prolonging it, I am afraid, rather more than was necessary; for which I expect you will combat my assertion that I was not a coward.

"So he's going at last!" the Captain said, with a sorrowful glance into the corner. "I—I call that hard, poor thing!"

The sergeant called softly as I went by,

"Have you told her? If it was my wife—if I was you, I'd rather be under fire than have it to do!"

"I say, mum"—and Pat, the warm-hearted, was tugging at my sleeve with his one arm—"I say, how long'll he hold out?"

"Till night."

"May the Houly Vargin an' all the Saints have mercy on her!" he ejaculated, fervently. "She's sech a poor young critter, shure!"

But the thing that most unmanned me, more than all the anxious questions that met me from each bed as I passed along—the messages from Jones and Brown, or the condescending sympathy of the rebel—was the entreaty of my little drummer-boy, who had lain in agony with his wound for many weeks, and was himself marked with the touch of that unerring finger that no human care or love can parry: an orphan child, to whom now I alone was a mother, and so it was that even to look at him as he turned his patient face so mutely on the pillow brought the quick tears. Putting up his hand into mine he said, softly,

"Is the Chaplain here?"

The Chaplain was sick that morning, and so I told him.

"Who'll pray for that man?"

"My boy, he isn't afraid to die; he needs no chaplain."

"But his wife; she has such a white, white face!"

I was silent. I could not tell him how she

needed prayer—purer, better prayers than mine could be.

"I remember how mother felt when father died," he said, and spoke no more then, but turned his face quietly away. I saw that he folded his hands, and I heard the echo of a whisper on his lips.

I went up at last to Mary Rand and touched her shoulder.

"I want to see you a moment," I said.

She turned with a look of surprise, stooped a moment to touch her husband's forehead with her hand, then rose and followed me.

We sat down under a large entry window, quietly. I remember how the garish sunlight played about her worn face, and how the wind blew in gusts up the stairs and through the deserted passage.

"I have something to tell you," I began. But there I stopped, held fast by the look in her eyes. Dark, yet filled with the depths of some glowing light; transfixed like one who asks the question on which hangs an eternity. I caught her hand quickly and held it in both of mine. I could not speak. She understood the answer.

"I know"—speaking slowly in a voice that froze me—"I know what ye've come ter say. How long'll they give him?"

"The Doctor says the crisis must come to-night."

"To-night." She repeated the word slowly, like one whose memory is becoming treacherous. "To-night. Ef there's a God in heaven I hope He'll remember He's takin' all I've got left—all I've got left."

Her hand lay like ice in mine. She did not hear my words; she did not feel my touch which tried to detain her. She rose and walked slowly back, with uncertain step, as if she walked in the dark.

I found her when I came back in her old seat, in the same attitude of quiet watching, with the same unfaltering look, a shade paler, the lines about her mouth sharper, but her voice, when she spoke to her husband, clear and low in its love; and there was no cry or sobbing that might disturb his last few hours. That was in the morning. Once she left him, to go to the kitchen and feed her baby, but that was all. The broad noon-light struck at last in flakes of gold upon the floor. I brought up a little dinner, and tried gently to make her eat. She only shook her head, pushing it away. Through all the hot afternoon she did not seem to move her eyes from her husband's face. He was tossing on the bed in frenzy, calling for her, catching at her hand, but still he did not recognize her.

Her baby slept quietly on her arm. She did not seem to know it, holding it mechanically. Toward evening it wakened and cried. She paid no heed to it. I went up and took the child gently from her. Her arm remained in the same position as before. I could hear her quick, sharp breathing; but she did not look at me nor speak. I took the little thing away and found a negro girl to care for it, wondering as I

went, and felt the clinging hands about my neck, whether its warm touch could ever comfort her, and if God would not in mercy take them both.

The evening came at last. The boys were very quiet, and we sat watching through the windows the gorgeous hues of purple and gold that were in the sky. The great warm sun dropped at length behind the hills. The twilight began to creep in at the windows and fall heavily on the hospital floor. It wrapped her figure where she sat, one white, thin hand fanning her husband, the other lying clenched in her lap, her head bent toward the bed to listen to his ravings. Once, when he had called her name many times, I saw her drop the fan quickly and, creeping up, lay her head upon his arm with a long wail.

"Oh, Stephen, it's me! it's yer wife, Stephen! I hain't never left yer. Ef yer'd only kiss me once!"

Perhaps he understood her, for he put up the hand he held to his hot lips. She put her arm about his neck and kissed him once—twice—almost fiercely. Then she buried her face in the clothes. I could just hear her stifled cry, "Oh, my God! my God! my God!" three times—a cry that made me tremble. The evening wore away. Stephen Rand lay panting and weaker now as the night came on.

I sat watching the forms about his bed and the flickering of the newly-lighted lamps above the faces of my boys. Now and then some one called me, and I went silently to meet their wants. Often I could hear a groan from some sufferer, or the Captain's cough, but nearer and more distinctly Stephen Rand's labored breathing, and his wife's low voice soothing his delirium. Once the little drummer called faintly for some water. I went up to give it to him. He smiled as I left him, looking over to the corner.

"I haven't forgotten her," he said. So he turned away, and once more folded his hands.

I came back and sat down again. I could do nothing for him. His wife jealously watched for every care which now remained. I watched her face, wondering who would dare to comfort her when the morning came.

Presently her husband grew more quiet, and fell at last into an uneasy slumber, fitful and restless at first, but gradually he became quite still. The Doctor, with his finger on the pulse, looked, I thought, surprised.

Was it stupor, or rest? was it death, or life? The woman's eyes asked him mutely, but he could not tell her.

The light fell full upon her where she was crouched on the floor by the bed, her hands in her husband's. Her thin hair had fallen down about her neck; her face, with its drawn lips and hueless cheeks, looked more like death than the one on which she gazed. A soft, natural heat seemed to color that at last, and he stirred in his sleep. The Doctor passed his hand over the man's forehead, and I was sure his face brightened.

"Speak to him," he said to the wife.

She bent over, with her hair falling about her face so I could not see it.

"Stephen!"

He opened his eyes, and smiled faintly.

"Whar are ye, Mary?"

"Here, Stephen! I've tuk yer hand."

"Yes. I thought I'd got ter go away, Mary. God's giv me back ter ye!"

He was quite himself now—weak as an infant, his voice scarcely above a whisper, but natural in its tone; and the hand which his wife held had grown soft and moist.

She clasped it tightly, holding it up against her breast, and dropped her face upon the pillow by his, her hair falling over them both. Her whole slight frame was quivering. No one could see her face. Through the moments that passed before she spoke her husband touched her hair caressingly, and smiled. At last it came—a little, low cry, like a penitent child.

"Oh, Stephen! He's gav yer back, an' I won't never say hard things on Him agin! I thought—I thought, oh, my husband! I thought He'd tuk yer, an' left me all alone!"

I heard the sergeant's sobs from the other end of the room; the boys who had sat up in bed, holding their breath to listen, lay down again and turned their faces to the wall; the Doctor choked; and as for me I ran out of the room, locked myself in up stairs, and cried like a baby for fifteen minutes.

When I went to the drummer-boy a while after and touched his forehead I started at the chill. His hands were still folded as when he sought from the orphan's God a blessing for this humbled, grateful woman; and even while he asked he stood face to face. She was a stranger, but he took her in—in to his pure child's heart!

Who can tell what agencies that prayer set at work? Who knows what she owed to the boy lying so still and with such a smile before her?